



AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR Suicide Prevention

May 5, 2014

The Honorable Ron Barber
1029 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Barber:

On behalf of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), I am writing to thank you for introducing the **Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014**.

Today, 105 Americans will complete suicide. More than 38,000 Americans from all walks of life will end their lives this year, and in 90% of these suicides there will be an underlying, diagnosable mental illness present. One of the best ways to prevent suicide is by understanding and treating mental disorders.

As the nation's largest organization dedicated to suicide prevention, we applaud you for including many of AFSP's federal legislative priorities in your legislation. **Through your action and leadership we can save lives and increase the quality of life for those persons living with a mental illness.**

Advancing critical medical research at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is a major public policy priority for AFSP. We support amending the Public Health Services Act for additional funding specifically for suicide prevention research at NIMH; at \$40 million a year in 2015 thru 2019. The legislation also encourages NIMH to undertake additional research projects on serious mental illness and self or other directed violence. We hope this is just the first major step towards increasing federal funding overall for suicide prevention research. A fully funded **National Violent Death Reporting System** is a critical piece of data and information collection vital to our entire future mental health public policy making.

We applaud the inclusion of the **reauthorization of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act**. This provision will renew the commitment to and strengthens critically important youth, Native American, and college suicide prevention programs administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, ensuring they are best designed to meet the needs of those they are intended to serve.

In addition we support the **many other provisions of your legislation around service member and veterans mental health. Making sure that Mental Health Parity is real for all Americans is another priority that we support. Improving Medicaid and Medicare mental health services needs to be a national priority too. Developing the behavioral health work force, along with improving behavioral health information technology is critically important too.** We believe that all of these important provisions included in the Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014 will help ensure that mental health issues truly become a national health priority like Alzheimer's, breast cancer, HIV AIDS and heart disease.

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We look forward to working with you and your team to strengthen and invest in **the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**. We are pleased to see a provision calling for the creation of a **new White House Office of Mental Health Policy within the Executive Office of the President, along with a National Mental Health Advisory Board**.

I have asked John Madigan, AFSP's Vice President of Public Policy, and his team in Washington, DC, to work with you and your staff on moving this legislation forward. John may be reached at 202-449-3600, ext. 103, or by email at jmadigan@afsp.org. We will also alert our Arizona volunteers and staff, as well as our entire nationwide AFSP Field Advocate network, about the importance of this new legislation and urge them to contact their House members to sign on as cosponsors.

As you know, AFSP is the leading national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research, education and advocacy, and to reaching out to people with mental disorders and those impacted by suicide. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention represents a constituency that now exceeds one million individuals including scientific experts, mental health clinicians, individuals who live with mental disorders and those who have experienced one of the worst outcomes of mental illness – the loss of a loved one to suicide.

Representative Barber we thank you again for your outstanding leadership on mental health, suicide prevention and substance use policy issues in the United States House of Representatives.

Sincerely,



Robert Gebbia
Chief Executive Officer